Shatakshi, Sakambhari and Durga

Durgama the asura

Like all other asuras, Durgama, Ruru's son – a descendant of Hiranyaksha, too wants to reign supreme in all the three worlds. Durgama is shrewd. He knows that Bhoomi, Swarga and Patala thrive on the spiritual power that lies in the sacred Vedas. The Brahmanas chant mantras and perform the rites, rituals and yagnas that are prescribed in the Vedas and empower the devas with their offerings. He astutely concludes that he can rule all the three lokas without even lifting his sword if he manages to destroy the Vedas.

So he goes to the loftiest peak in the Himalayas and worships Brahma for countless years. Brahma appears before him and says, "Name your boon, asura and I shall grant it to you." Durgama instantly says, "Let the power of every mantra in the four Vedas suffuse my being. I alone should have all the power of the Vedas from now on." Brahma, the author of the Vedas flinches when he hears Durgama's words but hands over the Vedas to him and disappears.

The very next moment Durgama feels the power of the Vedas coursing through him. And the Brahmanas are shocked out of their wits because they are unable to recall even a single mantra. Without chanting the right mantras, they cannot perform any rituals or yagnas. They are unable to perform the rites of Sandhya, Sraddha, Yagna and Japa too. This, in turn, depletes the power of the devas because they no longer get

any offerings from the Brahmanas. Soon the darkness of chaos takes the place of order, harmony and light everywhere.

Meanwhile, Durgama plunders Amravati, drives the devas out of Swarga and gains absolute power over all the three lokas. The devas and Brahmanas see Durgama brimming with radiance. They are shocked to hear that Brahma has gifted the power of the Vedas to Durgama. But they can do nothing about it. So Indra and the other devas are forced to hide in secret caverns in the Himalayas. They realize that only Parashakti, Devi Bhagavati can help them out of this crisis.

The plight of the Brahmanas on Prithvi is worse. There is drought and famine everywhere. There is no sign of rain for decades together. Human beings, animals, birds, insects, plants and trees slowly perish due to the dry never-ending heat. Carcasses of animals and human beings are strewn all over Prithvi. Everything has perished. There is no one to perform even the Sraddha ceremonies of the dead.

The few surviving Brahmanas gather together, climb the blessed Himalayas and invoke the blessings of Devi Bhagavati for they know that only she can help them survive this strange calamity that has befallen them all. They meditate upon her sacred name for decades.

Devi Bhagavati as Shatakshi and Sakambhari

Pleased by the intensity of their devotion, the dark Devi appears before them. She holds a bow, a quiver, a lotus and the bright seeds of life in her four hands. The Devi is moved to

tears when she witnesses the sorrows and the grief of her devotees. Tears flow out through her eyes too.

The Brahmanas gaze at her divine form and watch with awe when a thousand eyes appear all over the Devi’s dark body. They see tears flowing down as precious streams and rivers onto Prithvi through all her thousand eyes.

She then scatters the divine seeds that she has brought along with her from her fourth hand. All kinds of fruit trees, plants, vegetables, grass and grains grow from these seeds. Soon, the Devi's tears rise as vapour into the heavens. The next instant thunderstorms lash onto the parched surface of Prithvi who with deep gratitude drinks deeply from the waters that Devi Bhagavati showers on her.

The Devas come out of their caverns in Sumeru and witness the transformation on Prithvi. They know that the Devi was shedding tears of divine mercy on all of them. Devi Bhagavati then feeds them all with divine roots and fruits and helps them regain their strength.

The Devi weeps tears of mercy for her devotees through her thousand eyes. So they call her Shatakshi. She scatters the seeds of precious green food on Prithvi, so she is known as Sakambhari. The devas and the Brahmanas bow down to her with gratitude and say, “Please restore the Vedas to the Brahmanas for only then can we sustain ourselves spiritually.”

News about the Devi’s manifestation reaches Durgama. He sees the thunderstorms and the lightning, rounds up his huge

army and marches up the Himalayas to fight the Devi. The devas and Brahmanas are terrified of him and ask the Devi to protect them all.

Devi Bhagavati as Durga

The Devi smiles, draws a luminous circle of protection around them with her hand and asks them to stay within it. She then engages in a fierce battle with Durgama. She releases all her Shaktis. They spring out of her black body howling in rage, strike the asuras down with their fiery arrows, rip them apart, drink their blood thirstily and stuff them into their mouths greedily. Their combined screams of fury bring the three worlds to a standstill and shake the Nagas residing in Patala out of their deep slumber.

The battle between Shatakshi's Shaktis and Durgama lasts for ten days and nights. But Durgama was determined to retain the power of the Vedas with him. On the 10th day, he performs a long immensely potent ritual of darkness that he sources from the Atharva Veda. He can feel the power of this ritual flowing through his body. He then anoints himself in red sandalwood paste, wears a garland made out of vermillion coloured flowers and rides into the battle on his black chariot.

The Devi's numerous Shaktis fled from the battle within an hour because they could not rival the power of the Vedas that coursed through the asura's body. Devi Bhagavati knows Durgama was inviting his death now. She reabsorbs all her Shaktis into her cosmic form and fights a 12 hour long battle with the devious Durgama. So hideous was the battle between

the two that all the beings in the three lokas cowered in terror. Finally, the Devi releases fifteen sizzling arrows from her bow. All of them find their mark simultaneously. The first four kill Durgama's horses, the fifth sends his sarathy's head flying into the air, the sixth and seventh arrows gouge out his eyes, the eighth brings down the staff of his chariot, the ninth and tenth sever his arms and the last five arrow pierce his heart which explodes like a volcano erupting blood.

The terrified onlookers watch in awe as Durgama's spirit emerges as a bright light from his dead body and merges into the Devi Bhagavati. They all fall at her feet and look up at her reverentially. The hand which had strewn the seeds of life on Prithvi now holds a shining ball of light. The Devi smiles at them all radiantly, returns the Vedas to the Brahmanas and vanishes. And because she slays the asura Durgama, she is known as Durga.

Life itself cannot exist if we do not have the blessings of Shataskshi and Sakambhari. Durga elevates us to a higher realm. She empowers us spiritually. She creates a 'Durg'- a 'fortress' around our souls and gives us the courage to walk on the path that is prescribed in the Vedas. But without Shatakshi and Sakambhari, Durga cannot work her wonders in our lives. So let's seek the blessings of all the mothers of the cosmos.